



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, March 22, 2023

Day 23

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 30th Legislature

Fourth Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Hon. Leela Sharon, ECA, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Allard, Hon. Tracy L., ECA, Grande Prairie (UC)
Amery, Hon. Mickey K., ECA, KC, Calgary-Cross (UC)
Deputy Government House Leader
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA,
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, ECA, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., ECA, Calgary-Varsity (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Hon. Devin, ECA, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Eggen, Hon. David, ECA, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
Official Opposition Whip
Ellis, Hon. Mike, ECA, Calgary-West (UC)
Feehan, Hon. Richard, ECA, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, ECA, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., ECA, Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)
Glubish, Hon. Nate, ECA, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Gray, Hon. Christina, ECA, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Hon. Peter F., ECA, Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC),
Deputy Government House Leader
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, ECA, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horner, Hon. Nate S., ECA, Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
Hunter, Hon. Grant R., ECA, Taber-Warner (UC)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Issik, Hon. Whitney, ECA, Calgary-Glenmore (UC)
Jean, Hon. Brian Michael, KC, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche (UC)
Jones, Hon. Matt, ECA, Calgary-South East (UC)
LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, ECA, Red Deer-North (UC)
Loewen, Hon. Todd, ECA, Central Peace-Notley (UC)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Luan, Hon. Jason, ECA, Calgary-Foothills (UC)
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, ECA, KC, Edmonton-South West (UC),
Deputy Premier, Deputy Government House Leader
McIver, Hon. Ric, ECA, Calgary-Hays (UC)
Milliken, Hon. Nicholas, ECA, Calgary-Currie (UC)
Nally, Hon. Dale, ECA, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)
Neudorf, Hon. Nathan T., ECA, Lethbridge-East (UC),
Deputy Premier
Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, ECA, Calgary-Bow (UC)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Nixon, Hon. Jason, ECA, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre
(UC)
Nixon, Hon. Jeremy P., ECA, Calgary-Klein (UC)
Notley, Hon. Rachel, ECA, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Orr, Hon. Ronald, ECA, Lacombe-Ponoka (UC)
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Panda, Hon. Prasad, ECA, Calgary-Edgemont (UC)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, ECA, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Pon, Hon. Josephine, ECA, Calgary-Beddington (UC)
Rehn, Pat, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UC)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Rutherford, Hon. Brad, ECA, Leduc-Beaumont (UC),
Government Whip
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, ECA, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Savage, Hon. Sonya, ECA, KC, Calgary-North West (UC)
Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, ECA, Calgary-North East (UC)
Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, ECA, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Hon. Joseph R., ECA, Cardston-Siksika (UC),
Government House Leader
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, ECA, Calgary-Shaw (UC)
Shandro, Hon. Tyler, ECA, KC, Calgary-Acadia (UC)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, ECA, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Hon. Danielle, ECA, Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC),
Premier
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Toews, Hon. Travis, ECA, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC),
Deputy Government Whip
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., ECA, Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Calgary-Elbow
Vacant, Calgary-Lougheed

Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 2

Vacant: 2

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Shannon Dean, KC, Clerk
Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig, Senior Parliamentary
Counsel
Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and
Director of House Services

Nancy Robert, Clerk of *Journals* and
Committees
Janet Schwegel, Director of Parliamentary
Programs
Amanda LeBlanc, Deputy Editor of
Alberta Hansard

Terry Langley, Sergeant-at-Arms
Gareth Scott, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Lang Bawn, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Executive Council

Danielle Smith	Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Relations
Kaycee Madu	Deputy Premier, Minister of Skilled Trades and Professions
Nathan Neudorf	Deputy Premier, Minister of Infrastructure
Mickey Amery	Minister of Children's Services
Jason Copping	Minister of Health
Devin Dreesen	Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors
Mike Ellis	Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services
Nate Glubish	Minister of Technology and Innovation
Pete Guthrie	Minister of Energy
Nate Horner	Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation
Brian Jean	Minister of Jobs, Economy and Northern Development
Matt Jones	Minister of Affordability and Utilities
Adriana LaGrange	Minister of Education
Todd Loewen	Minister of Forestry, Parks and Tourism
Jason Luan	Minister of Culture
Nicholas Milliken	Minister of Mental Health and Addiction
Dale Nally	Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction
Demetrios Nicolaides	Minister of Advanced Education
Jeremy Nixon	Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services
Brad Rutherford	Minister without Portfolio
Sonya Savage	Minister of Environment and Protected Areas
Rajan Sawhney	Minister of Trade, Immigration and Multiculturalism
Joseph Schow	Minister without Portfolio
Rebecca Schulz	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Tyler Shandro	Minister of Justice
Travis Toews	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
Rick Wilson	Minister of Indigenous Relations

Parliamentary Secretaries

Tracy Allard	Parliamentary Secretary for Civil Liberties
Jackie Armstrong-Homeniuk	Parliamentary Secretary for Ukrainian Refugee Settlement
Tanya Fir	Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women
Shane Getson	Parliamentary Secretary for Economic Corridors
David Hanson	Parliamentary Secretary for Procurement Transformation
Martin Long	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business
Miranda Rosin	Parliamentary Secretary for Tourism
R.J. Sigurdson	Parliamentary Secretary for EMS Reform
Devinder Toor	Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism
Glenn van Dijken	Parliamentary Secretary for Agrifood Development
Tany Yao	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health
Muhammad Yaseen	Parliamentary Secretary for Community Outreach

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Orr
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Eggen
Gotfried
Gray
Hunter
Issik
Phillips
Pon

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. van Dijken
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Allard
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Carson
Feehan
McIver
Rowswell
Stephan
Walker

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Carson
Dang
Fir
Gotfried
Long
Sabir
Smith, Mark
Yao
Yaseen

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Ceci
Dach
Hunter
Loyola
Orr
Panda
Rehn
Shepherd
Toor

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Williams

Deol
Fir
Goehring
Gray
McIver
Pon
Rowswell
Sabir
van Dijken

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Mr. Williams
Deputy Chair: Ms Rosin

Irwin
Lovely
Nielsen
Nixon, Jason
Panda
Rehn
Sigurdson, L.
Singh
Sweet

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Reid
Deputy Chair: Mr. Gotfried

Aheer
Allard
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Deol
Ganley
Loyola
Nixon, Jason
Rehn
Renaud
Yao

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Hunter
Lovely
Pancholi
Panda
Renaud
Schmidt
Singh
Stephan
Toor
Yaseen

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Feehan

Aheer
Dach
Ganley
Getson
Issik
Nielsen
Orr
Sigurdson, R.J.
Singh
Turton

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 22, 2023

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 10 Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2023

The Deputy Chair: Are there any with comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to the bill? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on Bill 10 here in committee. I did have some comments last evening around the general, the second reading type of thing. And then, you know, second reading did imply reading, and upon further analysis I did see a section that I did want to draw the attention of the House to, which is section 15 on page 42 of Bill 10. As we said before, there are a number of sections in here that we have no quarrel with. I mean, there are lots of things that needed to get cleaned up. It sort of reads in some ways like a miscellaneous statutes act, but then in other ways there are other areas that I think perhaps we could have a little more close analysis of. So I do have an amendment that I would like to bring forward in regard to section 15, which is on page 42 of the bill, if everybody wants to flip there.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

This will be amendment A1.

If you would read it into the record for us, we'd appreciate it.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Sure. Thank you, Mr. Chair. The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West to move that Bill 10, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, be amended by striking out sections 15(2) and (5). As I said, those are sections that you'll find on page 42 and page 43 of this bill.

I guess what I was told by the minister's department when they brought forward this bill was that they were looking for ways by which they could allow for collaboration with other postsecondary institutions to support regional access to collaboration and undergraduate degree programs and stuff like that, right? Now, the thing is, though, that the example that the ministry gave for us was NorQuest, but of course NorQuest is not one of the private, independent colleges in Alberta, you know. In fact, it's funded like Bow Valley and Lethbridge College and so forth. It's in a different category to that. So my concern around sections 15(2) and (5) was that it could open the door for the government, without making new laws, to bring forward further degree-granting powers to private universities without the proper oversight that that change should entail.

If you're bringing forward a private degree and they're offering an undergraduate degree in the arts, let's say, for example, at a private university or private college, then there's usually a process that should go through that's quite rigorous. This seemed to circumvent that somehow. You know, I've been around long enough to see that we've had a number of colleges historically in Alberta that would come in and offer degrees and so forth. Number one, sometimes we had complaints, students had complaints about the quality of education that they were receiving. And then: to what

degree were the colleges with their certificates being actually recognized by employers and across Canada and across North America and around the world?

Always, when you are making changes to degree status and accreditation status, Mr. Chair, you have to make sure that you are ensuring the reputation and the credibility of not just the institution that might be asking for those changes but for our whole postsecondary system in general, because, of course, whether it's fair or not, the public and individuals will judge a degree or a ticket or a diploma or so forth, you know, collectively, sometimes saying: "Well, this is an Alberta diploma. Hey, have you heard that the Alberta diplomas maybe are not coming through as reputably as other places, from certain schools and so forth?" Part of our job here in the Legislature is to make sure we protect that reputation as well as protecting the integrity of degrees and diplomas that students will receive from schools around the province, right? Also, that protection means value for money, too. Of course, it's very expensive to go to school. If people are spending and getting for something that's advertised as one thing but maybe it's not, then, again, that is not fair to students and, again, affects the reputation of our postsecondary system in general, too.

My amendment – probably everybody has received that now – simply strikes out sections 15(2) and 15(5), which is, I think, a not unreasonable thing to do. Indeed, you know, if the purpose is to have more collaboration between colleges, like NorQuest or Bow Valley or something like that, to talk about other degree-granting potential, I mean, they're free to do that, and there are other ways by which we can do that. We don't have to remove the regulatory oversight that this body does provide to postsecondaries around the province. I believe there are other ways to do that. So I would encourage everyone to at least take a sober second look at this section and, hopefully, support my amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Others wishing to speak to amendment A1? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this section of the bill and specifically with regard to the amendment that's just been brought forward by the previous speaker. I certainly want to caution this government about how they move forward with changes to legislation that affects universities and academic institutions, particularly when it comes to independent academic institutions, that often find themselves in a very different category than some of our major institutions like the University of Alberta or the University of Calgary, the University of Lethbridge, for example. These institutions have, often, a different perspective on what it is that they're trying to accomplish in their work, and as such, you know, we should be a bit cautious about how we deal with them.

In this particular case we have under section (5) that it allows the minister the ability to add regulation-making authority. I'm concerned about having the minister given that kind of responsibility when they are not part of the very significant peer-led process of making decisions at a university. Moving decisions to the minister's ability and having institutions do that is something that we need to be a bit cautious about because the whole nature of successful universities is that they work on a collegial basis, that they work to examine each other to ensure that their standards are up to an appropriate level, and I think this is a good way to go about doing it. I think that they are the generators of knowledge. They are the transmitters of knowledge.

7:40

We should always try to ensure that it is the people who are most steeped in the area of knowledge that are the ones that would be making the decisions over all of the aspects of training our students, of ensuring that our students get the right kind of experiences, that they are exposed to the highest level of current information, and that they reach the standards that they need to reach in order to be able to graduate and be recognized as professional representatives within whatever field they have chosen. I think this is a good standard. It ensures that the people with the most knowledge in a particular situation are indeed making the decisions, and it has proven to be very effective over the years around the world in keeping the standards at a very high rate.

As such, I think it's important that we ensure that our universities all stick to what has been demonstrated to be a very good standard in society and that we ensure that the universities in the province of Alberta try to achieve that highest level of standard, as many of them try to do. I mean, we are fortunate to have universities here in Alberta that are considered in the top 100 in the world. We certainly want to maintain that level of success, and we don't want to do anything that will undermine the reputation that our universities have. Having a reputation is very significant in terms of being able to get grants from around the world, to attract excellence in research and scholarship. You know, we need to guard that here in this province to ensure that that's always the thing that we focus on most when we think about what a university does – that is, that it's achieving a level of excellence – and we shouldn't be doing anything to undermine that.

I know that there is a different kind of model in the States, that universities are often run by people with particular kinds of agendas and aren't always concerned about, you know, achieving the standards of excellence that our universities here in Alberta are trying to achieve. I would hate to see us move in any kind of direction that would start to slide down that slippery slope that they have in the States, where they have situations where a guy named Trump can put a university together and charge a lot of money for people and not produce any results and eventually have to close down. All of those students who went to that university not only lost their money, but they lost their time and they lost their opportunities. That's a dangerous place that I think that the Americans have gone, and I certainly don't want to see us go in that direction. The way we guard against that is that we ensure that all the decisions that are made in universities are reviewed by the other universities, the peers in the other universities, that they set the standards, that they review whether the standards have actually been met, and then they set a course for correction if ever a university is offline.

I know that as a university instructor I participated in exactly those kinds of processes. I have had the opportunity to meet accreditation standards and was very happy to receive feedback from, you know, experienced, knowledgeable people from around Canada who have given us direction about things that we should improve or things that we should change. I'm very happy that that's the process because, indeed, if we want to maintain our accreditation, we would respond to those kinds of criticisms and defend ourselves if indeed we felt the criticism was offline. It was an important, rigorous, collegial process, and I think that kind of a process is one that has resulted in excellence and one that we want to continue to support.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Others wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I want to applaud the Member for Edmonton-North West for bringing forward this amendment as it highlights very specific concerns.

Adding to the debate, I would really like to contribute how this actually impacts a lot of racialized people here in the province of Alberta. Of course, as you well know, many racialized people have been coming to the province of Alberta over the last 50 years, calling it home. The population of racialized people has been increasing, and we're very close to almost being at 50 per cent racialized people here in the province of Alberta. The Alberta of today looks very different than the Alberta of 50 years ago.

Now, the reality is that a lot of these racialized people are coming because of economic conditions in their own home country. They don't have as much equitable access to being able to provide for their families, so they look at coming to Edmonton and Alberta and Canada as an opportunity for them to provide a better future for themselves, for their families, especially their children. Especially their children. When they get here, often it's very difficult for them to receive accreditation for past education that they have received in their home country.

I've come across many a racialized constituent that now calls Alberta home, that has been in this particular situation, and then desperately is seeking some kind of recourse to be able to get education as quickly as possible so that they can enter into the job market and be able to make more money than just, for example, working in the service industry. I mean, that is an option for many of them. However, they would like to be able to provide for their families a lot more than just minimum wage, for example.

So then they go to some of these private postsecondary institutions, and they've actually come to me – a number of them have come to me and, for example, they've signed a contract with one of these postsecondary institutions for thousands and thousands of dollars. For some reason or another they have been unable to complete the program, and then they're left having to owe all of this money to that postsecondary institution, that private postsecondary institution. Then not only that, but we actually see a lot of these private postsecondaries saddling a lot of students with a lot of debt.

I mean, for some programs, yes, there is an opportunity for people to get some kind of grant from either the federal government or even to some extent from the provincial government as well. However, the vast majority of them can't access these grants, but they're so desperate to be able to provide for their family and also – let's be real about it – send money back home to dependants that they have back home, family members who they have back home who are going through very difficult times because of the economic situation in their home country.

I won't get into that, but in my particular perspective a lot of immigrants are coming here because, I will say, economic interests of Canada and the United States have impacted their economies in a negative way. Because those countries are saddled in debt through either loans that they received through the International Monetary Fund or the International Development Bank, they have created the conditions such that the economic situation in their home country has made it so that they can't actually have a future there. So because of that situation, they end up coming here, hoping that they're going to have a better future here. And, of course, with these postsecondary institutions, those who attempt to enrol in some of these programs or some of these courses and things like that end up being saddled with an enormous amount of debt, and it puts them

in a very precarious state because eventually they have to pay that back. It's a very difficult situation.

7:50

I applaud again the Member for Edmonton-North West for bringing forward this amendment. I'm not saying that there are an incredible number of bad actors when it comes to private postsecondary institutions – there are a lot of them that are doing an incredible job; they're providing opportunities for a lot of people so that they can go back and get an education and then enter the job market, and a lot of them do then provide for their families – but unfortunately there are some bad actors. That's why this amendment is suggesting that sections 15(2) and 15(5) be stricken from the bill, so that instead of this being done in regulation, it'll have to actually come back into legislation so it could actually be discussed inside this House, where we can actually debate these matters before just writing kind of, like, a blank cheque to a lot of these postsecondary institutions so that they can do whatever they like.

Of course, as I was stating, saddling a lot of these students with debt actually adversely impacts a lot of racialized communities here in the province of Alberta. I would beg the members on the other side of the House to give this a second thought, to really consider this amendment, that it really does impact the pocketbook of people who are desperately seeking opportunities to become further educated, too, so that they can supplement their income. At the end of the day, we're trying to make it easier and better for Albertans to be able to access better paying jobs inside of the Alberta job market, so that they can provide for their families, make sure that their children can go to postsecondary educational institutions, which is what a lot of them end up coming to Alberta for. They want to see their children be able to go to postsecondary and be able to get an education so that the whole family can then improve their lot.

With this particular amendment, again I ask the members to please consider it. It's something that should come to the House through legislation rather than just having the minister focus on particular regulations, so that there can be more oversight of these private postsecondary educational institutions.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview to join debate.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to add my voice to the debate on this amendment to Bill 10, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. Of course, as my colleagues have all shared, it does strike out two sections, the part that gives the minister the authority to just, through his office, through regulations, designate these independent academic institutions or take away that designation, either/or. Both of those pieces in the legislation the amendment wants to strike.

There's a bit of a trend, of course, with this government. The UCP has brought other bills forward giving ministers authority to do things through regulation. That means that they get to do it through a ministerial order, not by bringing it to this Legislature so that all 87 members can have a say, so that it can be a transparent process. We can all, both in opposition, independent, or government members, speak to that. I guess I just ask: why? Why is this needed? Why does it need to be done sort of clandestinely? We know that, as I said, many other pieces of legislation – probably the most egregious one was the health bill during the pandemic. It gave extraordinary powers to the Health minister, and even the UCP could see in time that that had gone too far, and they did introduce

legislation to take that power away. That was an important step back.

But I think that it does erode democracy when these types of bills come forward. We know that a constitutional democracy has checks and balances. Certainly, putting the legislation in front of the members of this Assembly is an important aspect of the oversight. It gives people an opportunity in our province that may have interest in this area to know what we're talking about, and then they can reach out to their MLAs, give them feedback about it. But all of that is being, you know, taken away because it just can be done behind closed doors by a ministerial order.

This amendment, of striking out these two sections, I commend all the members of this Legislature to support because it takes away that undue power. I mean, I think it's much better if that legislation can be brought to the House. Just looking at the way the bill is written now, it's always really important to ask, like: who benefits? Who benefits from legislation? Why is someone bringing this forward? Who is the government wanting to support in this? It's always important to look at, you know, who's going to have a benefit.

Let's just think about that, and I know some of my colleagues have already talked about this. Will students benefit by this, by the creation of an independent academic institution that the minister can just designate? I don't know; we have some pretty significant public institutions in our province. We know private institutions don't have that rigour of public oversight. Why is it that we need private ones?

We know from past experience – DeVry is an example. You know, it closed suddenly. Students were left with a lot of debt. Their courses were – they may have been midstream in their academic career, and all of a sudden the institution that they were meant to complete their degrees in was gone. Besides the other, you know, issues that have been brought up, the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie talked about how much newcomers to Canada are impacted by this and perhaps taken advantage of by some of these institutions. So it doesn't sound like students are benefiting.

Would staff benefit from this? I guess they would get a job, but there is that precariousness about whether that institution is solid enough, you know, and if it's a for-profit model. It seems like there are so many factors. And that's what happened with DeVry. They had issues with enrolment in the States, and that impacted some of their – well, I think Calgary was the only one that had a DeVry academic institution, and that closed because of stuff that happened in the States with the markets and that kind. So – I don't know – it makes it pretty precarious for staff as well.

Would the owners of these private institutions benefit? I mean, I guess that's where I'm heading. I'm thinking that's probably why the UCP wants to do this: because they've been in consultation with people who want to start up private academic institutions, so this is kind of reaching out to them for support. You know, they could obviously stand to make a lot of profit from these types of private institutions, so perhaps that's what it's about.

I think the fourth group that I'd ask who benefits would be the community. Do they benefit from this? But, again, if it is a pretty precarious situation, if it's not an institution that's going to stay and support people over time, it probably will take more away than support the community.

This amendment goes a long way to, I think, supporting that not to happen. We want to make sure that we have strong academic institutions that are here for a long time, that are serving the community, the students, and also that the staff have stable jobs in them. I guess I commend all of my colleagues in this House to vote for this amendment so that the minister cannot designate, just by ministerial order, by regulations, the independence of an academic

institution that is degree granting. I just commend everyone to support this amendment.

With that, I'll take my seat. Thank you.

8:00

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Anyone else wishing to speak? I see the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak against the amendment that the hon. member opposite has put forward tonight. Independent academic institutions play a very important role in offering choice in postsecondary education to Albertans. You know, a number of the issues that have been raised by the other side I believe are very weak. There's an accreditation process that is required before any postsecondary institutions can ultimately receive the status as an accredited degree-granting postsecondary institution in the province. Moreover, there would be rigorous review before any changes were made by the minister. Again, I believe that it would be in the purview of the Minister of Advanced Education to ensure that there are additional responsible school choice options for postsecondary students in Alberta. That's why we believe this regulation-making authority is important in Bill 10.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Anyone else to add to the debate this evening?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back on the main bill, Bill 10. I see the hon. Member for Calgary-North has risen.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am honoured to rise to speak to Bill 10. One of the reasons I ran for public office was because I always wanted to see responsible and accountable government, and I think this bill has achieved that objective. Bill 10, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, will help build fiscal stability, attract investment, support children and families, cut red tape, improve provincial funding mechanisms, and make life more affordable for students. These measures are crucial to Albertans, and they are critical to the well-being of our province. With the implementation of Bill 10, Alberta will be able to safeguard the present and provide security for future generations.

Bill 10 would propose amendments to the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act to legislate a new fiscal framework for Alberta to prosper. The fiscal framework would require all future Alberta governments to balance their annual budgets, with certain exceptions, and use any surpluses – and I emphasize the word “surpluses”; they would have to create surpluses first and then deal with that – to first pay down debt and save for the future before investing in one-time initiatives. It would require a government to use 50 per cent of surplus cash to pay down debt maturing in that fiscal year. The rest would be deposited into the Alberta fund to give the government time to determine how to responsibly use it.

I truly believe that this is the way forward for Alberta and for Albertans. A balanced budget would allow more fiscal stability for our province without adding further burdens to our debt, that taxpayers and future generations of Albertans are forced to pay out. Bill 10 would also require transparency to Albertans. The government would provide a detailed reporting on the use of funds from the Alberta fund. A government that keeps secrets is not a government that works for Albertans. Transparency is an essential component to healthy government-public relationships.

Bill 10 states that money from the Alberta fund can only be used for three purposes: to further pay down debt, to invest in the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, or for one-time initiatives that do not permanently increase government spending. Enforcing rules that will be applied pertaining to any government entity is important in ensuring that a government cannot make sweeping changes to Alberta's savings plan and funds. Consistency is the key when it comes to future planning, especially for a growing province such as Alberta.

Mr. Chair, Bill 10 also proposes amendments to streamline the transfer of money from the general revenue fund to the heritage savings trust fund. Currently legislation requires a portion of the heritage fund's net income to be kept in the fund to protect against inflation. Any investment income not used for inflation-proofing of the heritage fund must be transferred to the general revenue fund.

This new legislation would allow the heritage fund to retain all its net income. If we had done this from the very beginning, as stated by a number of members on this side, there would be close to \$300 billion in the trust fund today instead of \$18 billion, that we presently have.

Mr. Chair, I remember that this fund was established in 1976, actually May 19, 1976, under the government of Alberta, and at that time we had Premier Peter Lougheed, who was an inspiration for me to get into politics. So gone by is gone by. We need to protect this fund now. Although we are unable to protect the past, we can look forward to the future and recognize how we can do better and ultimately make better decisions.

Albertans deserve responsible policies that create effective and positive changes. Albertans deserve to feel financially safe and secure for many years to come, and they deserve a government that promotes these values. With all the good that comes with Bill 10, the section pertaining to postsecondary students is particularly important to myself and to my constituents in Calgary-North. Mr. Chair, affordability is a top priority for many Albertans, but affordability for postsecondary is especially important. Reducing financial barriers for students to access postsecondary education is a personal goal of mine but also for this government.

With Bill 10, Alberta's government would implement a 2 per cent cap on tuition increases for domestic students at the institutional level at a public postsecondary institution for 2024-25 and future academic years. A 2 per cent cap would make a significant difference for tuition and tuition increases. Students should not have to feel barred from classes because they cannot afford to attend, especially with consideration of inflation.

Bill 10 would make sure that more students will be able to enter postsecondary institutions, and it will also ensure that they can afford to stay until graduation. It is so important that Albertans have access to postsecondary learning, and I am very proud that Bill 10 effectively addresses this issue.

Lastly, I would like to touch on Bill 10 tackling the financial hurdles of families wanting to adopt in Alberta. Every child deserves a safe and loving environment to grow up in. The process of giving a child a caring home should not be difficult or expensive. With Bill 10, new subsidies, a higher tax credit, and other supports would make adoption more feasible for Albertans.

8:10

Mr. Chair, this bill incorporates aspects from various categories that are incredibly important to our province and to Albertans. Bill 10 will allow Albertans to feel confident in major financial decisions of the government while also building vibrant communities, municipalities, and supporting strong families, students, and individuals. Those are the reasons that I will be

supporting this bill, and I urge members on this side and on that side to please support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Other members wishing to add comments, questions, or amendments? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has risen.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure, you know, on one of my final occasions, to rise and speak to a bill in this Chamber. It's interesting, the bill that I'm speaking to. Honestly, I appreciate that much of this bill is housekeeping, but there were a couple of numbers where my eyes went over and went back and went over and went back, and I thought: this can't be correct. But here it is, printed in black and white, that the government, this government, that has often decried, when it's been in opposition, previous government spending before an election, including the Premier when she was the leader of the Wildrose Party – I was in this Chamber listening to her decry how outrageous it was that the then Premier, Alison Redford, had spending in her budget ahead of an election.

Mr. Chair, it is absolutely ridiculous, preposterous, absurd that this bill gives this government a \$1.4 billion slush fund ahead of the election. If there is actually a true conservative over there, they should be outraged. Apparently, there aren't; the UCP are a bunch of socialists. What world am I living in? A \$1.4 billion slush fund for one-time infrastructure investments: like, you can't scream "buying votes" more than \$1.4 billion worth of them, one-time investments, before an election.

There are members in this House that served back in 2015 that agreed and voted in favour of legislation that we brought forward which put a buffer zone around the election that prohibited governments from spending ahead of writ drop. Why? Because everybody sees it for what it is: it's buying votes. One of the first acts that this government did under the former Premier Jason Kenney was to undo that legislation, which allows the current government to be able to spend \$1.4 billion in April. That's in addition, Mr. Chair, to the \$3 million of advertising in this bill plus the \$6 million additional advertising fund in the sup supply bill.

This bill is an attack on democracy. If every party doesn't have the same ability to spend that kind of money, the government is essentially bribing Albertans with their own money ahead of the election. It's absolutely ridiculous.

What I like less are conservatives in socialist clothing, which is what this bill is doing. Honestly, Mr. Chair, this goes against every fundamental tenet and pillar of democracy. This was the exact reason that in 2015 the newly formed NDP government brought in election financing as our Bill 1, which banned both corporate and union donations and said that if individual Albertans want to make contributions to political parties, then they should be able to, with a limit on how much they can donate, but we should remove the ability for corporations and unions to be able to donate. And we did.

We did bring in a bill that then ensured that governments couldn't take advantage of tax dollars and their position to be able to make a whole bunch of spending announcements right before the election. Members on the other side that were in this Chamber voted in favour of it. I mean, I can start naming them by constituency, who voted in favour of it. It was essentially every member who is still in this Chamber who was elected in 2015. I don't know if we had unanimous consent, but members agreed that it is undemocratic and unfair to all the other political parties if the government takes advantage of their position of being government and using tax dollars.

The other thing here, Mr. Chair, is that governments should not be allowed to use tax dollars to buy votes on the eve of an election. It's beyond frustrating that the government is doing this. You know what? Honestly, I'm quite surprised that the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board actually supports this and has put this bill forward because I believe – and I still want to believe – that he's a man of integrity and that this crosses that line of giving the government the ability to do major announcements, injecting \$1.4 billion, on the eve of an election. It begs the question. The government had four years to be able to make these announcements, to make these investments, so I will struggle to accept the answer that these are critical investments that Alberta needs. Maybe. But then they should have been made six months ago or three years ago, or they should be postponed until after the election, not used as a way to try to curry favour. So that's disappointing.

Like I said, the rest of the bill is mostly housekeeping, which I can support and I appreciate, but this one section, along with an additional \$3 million in advertising – Mr. Chair, political parties during the campaign period can only spend somewhere around \$2 million, so this is giving the government another \$3 million to advertise. You know, I appreciate the argument that the government is currently using on advertising, yet if the government checks what they said in *Hansard* in 2018-19 or in 2014-15 or 2011-12, all of those opposition parties said: well, this is ridiculous. I mean, back in the day Alison Redford spent a few hundred thousand dollars, and the then leader of the Wildrose lost it. I encourage Albertans to check *Hansard* and look at the comments that she made, citing that it is completely undemocratic, that it's buying votes, that it should not be allowed, that it places the government at an unfair advantage, which it does.

I appreciate that the Deputy Premier is trying to signal the chair. I'm talking about Bill 10. I'm giving context to previous opposition parties, which the government was . . .

Mr. Eggen: And will be again.

8:20

Mr. Bilous: . . . and will be soon, decrying, through the chair, that this was completely undemocratic. And it is.

I mean, I honestly believe that members on the other side of the Chamber in the future will look back and go: yeah, that was completely undemocratic, trying to spend \$1.4 billion in the month preceding the election. It really begs the question: are we still in Alberta? Are we still in a democratic country? Are we still in a democratic place? This type of pre-election spending should not be allowed by any political party. It shouldn't be.

I appreciate that governments have a job to do and that some spending, which is again why I can support the majority of what's in this bill, needs to take place. But a one-time funding announcement of \$1.4 billion: no matter which way you cut it, Albertans will recognize that this is an undemocratic move meant to buy votes.

For that reason, I cannot support this bill.

The Deputy Chair: Others wishing to speak? The President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Just want to get up and respond to the hon. member. Firstly, let me say and let it be on the record that I appreciate his concern around fiscal responsibility. That's a concern we both share.

But, Mr. Chair, I struggle to understand the section that he's referring to when he talks about \$1.4 billion in pre-election spending because included in Bill 10 are, in fact, a number of sections related to establishing fiscal rules. These rules, in fact, will provide more structure, not less, more discipline, not less, more

oversight, not less, more transparency, not less than the current financial administration rules, that are in place today. They will not supersede the financial administration rules. They will add to the FAA, the Financial Administration Act, where those rules are found.

Mr. Chair, Bill 10 does not give the government any ability to spend \$1.4 billion ahead of the election. It simply does not. If the member is referring to the Alberta fund and the provisions, the ability, and the very specified narrow uses of the Alberta fund, I want to add some colour because there are three allowable uses . . . [interjection] If the member opposite would listen, he may learn right now.

There are three allowable, eligible uses for funds from the Alberta fund. Number one is to hold the funds for future debt repayment. I think everybody in this House would agree that that's a very legitimate purpose. Number two, funds from the Alberta fund can be transferred to the heritage savings trust fund. It's excellent when we can in fact transfer additional funds to the heritage savings trust fund, and I will add, Mr. Chair, that this year we're sending over an additional \$2 billion. The third eligible use is in fact to use the funds for one-time, non-reoccurring projects. To fund those projects, they have to be one-time, non-reoccurring, and align with government priorities.

But in the absence of an Alberta fund, that ability was always there. The Alberta fund does not create the ability. The Alberta fund creates transparency around the use of those funds. In fact – in fact – any spending from the Alberta fund for one-time expenditures has to be subject to an appropriations bill, an appropriations bill debated right here on the floor of this House. It is required.

We have a budget on the floor right now. [interjection] Again I would ask the member to listen because he has lots to learn here. We have a budget on the floor today. We've gone through the estimates process. We will be, I trust, passing that budget in a transparent way, and that appropriations bill will guide the spending of the government for the upcoming year. Any expenditures from the Alberta fund are subject to that process, Mr. Chair. The Alberta fund adds more structure, more transparency, more discipline, not less.

The Deputy Chair: Others wishing to speak? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has risen.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a privilege to rise this evening. [interjections] I'll just give everyone a moment. Before I begin, I am hoping that as I get into discussion on Bill 10, you will provide some latitude and maybe more latitude than you've ever provided a member before. You know, with this being my last opportunity, very, very likely, this evening to address the House – and I would be happy to make a contribution to a nonprofit charity of your choice, nonpartisan preferably. And for any Albertans who have a private member trying to bribe the chair on their bingo card, you can mark that one off.

But in all seriousness, with this being my last opportunity, very likely, to speak to the Assembly and to speak to Albertans – and I'm usually quite an emotional person, Mr. Chair, so I'm going to do my best here – I just want to take this opportunity, first of all, to recognize my parents, Kimberly and Regan; my amazing sister Mikaelyn, who inspires me every day; my beautiful, patient, brilliant wife, Kailey, and partner, coming up this month, of 15 years – I don't want to get that wrong . . .

An Hon. Member: You're not even that old.

Mr. Carson: We've been partners for 15, married for far less. . . . our amazing son, Clark, who is about 20 months old now. In addition, you may or may not know, Mr. Chair, that we are

expecting another boy. Now, everything I've done over the last eight years has been for my family, and I hope that I have made all of them as proud as they have made me.

Mr. Chair, it's not lost on me, the privilege that it is to stand in this Assembly. As I've said before, my mother was 14 years old when I was born and raised me as a single mother for many years. There is no way that I could repay her for what she has sacrificed to provide for me.

But every day as an MLA I think about the many Albertans who find themselves in situations where they need support. Now, my role as an MLA has always been about giving back to the province and my community, that helped me in so many ways from childhood on, and I believe it's my job to leave the ladder down, so to say, not pull it up behind me.

You know, going to Britannia junior high, followed by Jasper Place high school, finally NAIT: there are so many educators that have helped and inspired me along the way. To the health care providers at our local hospitals, like the Misericordia, to the health care aides that provide support to seniors throughout our communities, to the thousands of volunteers of nonprofits who support a variety of important initiatives across the province: thank you from the bottom of my heart. I know that goes the same for all members of this Assembly.

Now, I could not ever have imagined to find myself on this journey. There are so many people to thank. Again, I appreciate your indulgence, Mr. Chair, I really do. The many volunteers and caucus staff that have helped over so many years, personally Sabine and Phil in my office, who work on behalf of so many constituents, as well as the many CAs that have supported me and my office over the years: I am forever in debt for your support.

I'm very close, Mr. Chair. I promise.

The MLAs that have served with me over the last four to eight years: there is nothing that I could say to properly portray how important your voices and your friendships mean to me. You know, you truly are my family. Each and every day I see them breaking down doors and smashing glass ceilings for those who will follow.

Finally, to the sheriffs and Legislative Assembly security that protect our democracy every day, to the pages who provide support to our members, to the table officers, and other support staff here in the House: thank you for everything over the last eight years.

You know, Mr. Chair, our democracy is a beautiful and imperfect system. We must do everything in our power to strengthen and protect it. That includes finding ways to make it more equal, to give voice to the voiceless, and to inspire others. This has been the honour of a lifetime, and I will do everything in my power to repay my community, which has provided so much to me for so many years.

Thank you. [Standing ovation]

8:30

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I just want to say: good for you on getting the years together right, because it's in the public record for time eternal. Good for you. Thank you, hon. member.

Others wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, we're ready for the question. You didn't give me enough time to practise in Committee of the Whole last night, so bear with me.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 10 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Mr. Rutherford: Mr. Chair, I move that the committee rise and report bills 9 and 10 and report progress on bills 11 and 12.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

Mr. Turton: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 9, Bill 10. The committee reports progress on the following bills: Bill 11, Bill 12. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? Carried.

Government Bills and Orders
Third Reading
Bill 8
Alberta Firearms Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. government whip.

Mr. Rutherford: Mr. Speaker, thank you for recognizing me. It is an honour to rise today on behalf of the Minister of Justice and move third reading of Bill 8, the Alberta Firearms Act.

We introduce this legislation to clarify and protect the province’s role in regulating firearms and to advocate for lawful firearm owners. The Alberta Firearms Act will put the interests of law-abiding firearms owners first. It accomplishes three main goals: one, it supports the firearms community in the face of Ottawa’s attacks on lawful firearm owners; it reduces confusion and increases accountability regarding the Chief Firearms Officer’s role; and, three, it creates tools that enable Alberta to protect its jurisdiction over firearms. Mr. Speaker, with over 340,000 licensed firearm owners in the province, with over 680 firearm-related businesses the firearms community is an essential part to the Alberta culture and heritage in this province.

The suggestion that this legislation is unnecessary or creates a less safe environment for Albertans is patently false, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Firearms Act enables Alberta to protect its jurisdiction over firearms and raises awareness of the work of the Chief Firearms Officer, who, I must recognize, has done a fantastic job in a very short amount of time since her appointment. She has tirelessly reached out to the public across this province, including the Alberta firearms community, in helping to educate Albertans about the importance of safe, lawful firearm use.

By passing Bill 8, the Alberta Firearms Act will ensure that the important work can continue. The Alberta Firearms Act will strengthen Alberta’s ability to regulate, administer, and advocate on behalf of firearm owners. The act will clarify the role of the Chief Firearms Officer within the provincial legislation to provide the CFO with a stronger, clearer role and require the CFO to issue an annual report in order to enhance public accountability.

Upon its passage the Alberta Firearms Act will be the most comprehensive provincial firearms framework in the country. As the Minister of Justice has said, by establishing in legislation the role of Alberta’s Chief Firearms Officer, this legislation will elevate the responsibilities and legal mandate of the office to the fullest

extent of the law. Alberta stands unequivocally with hunters, farmers, sport shooters, and the Indigenous peoples, all of whom understand the importance of responsible firearm ownership and its part in Alberta’s heritage and culture.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to move third reading of the Alberta Firearms Act.

The Acting Speaker: Are there members wishing to speak to third reading of Bill 8?

Seeing none, I look to the minister to close debate.

Mr. Rutherford: Waived.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:37 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Madu	Smith, Mark
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Nally	Stephan
Gotfried	Nixon, Jason	Toews
Guthrie	Orr	Turton
Hanson	Rosin	van Dijken
Horner	Rowswell	Walker
Jones	Rutherford	Wilson
LaGrange	Sawhney	Yao
Long	Sigurdson, R.J.	Yaseen
Lovely		

Against the motion:

Carson	Sabir	Sigurdson, L.
Eggen	Schmidt	Sweet
Feehan		

Totals: For – 28 Against – 7

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a third time]

Bill 9
Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2023

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move third reading of Bill 9, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2023.

Bill 9 continues this government’s efforts to eliminate red tape for Albertans and Alberta businesses. It marks another step toward our goal of reducing red tape by one-third by the end of 2023. Since 2019 we’ve eliminated thousands of burdensome regulatory requirements. We’ve streamlined processes and procedures to make life easier for Albertans, and we’ve also reduced costly and unnecessary administration. Mr. Speaker, the changes we’ve made through our six previous red tape reduction bills have helped make Alberta one of the most business-friendly environments in all of North America, and job creators are taking notice of our efforts to make it easier to invest and do business here. We’ve sped up approvals and enabled the use of digital communications for organizations. We’ve maintained important protections for Albertans’ health and safety as well as the environment, and we’ve created opportunities for businesses to expand and grow.

Mr. Speaker, by eliminating unnecessary red tape, we also continue to improve the way we deliver services to Albertans and

make their lives easier, and we've done it all by listening to Albertans who best understand the challenges that red tape presents. Hundreds of Albertans have shared their red tape reduction ideas on our cut red tape website, and through nine separate industry panels we've listened carefully to the recommendations of experts in our key industries. Their comments and participation have guided us in prioritizing initiatives that have the most impact on the ground, and we continue to see this reflected in Bill 9.

Bill 9 is the seventh red tape reduction bill the government has brought forward and includes 14 sets of amendments across nine government ministries that will save Albertans, businesses, and government time as well as money. Many of these common-sense changes respond directly to input from Albertans and Alberta businesses and will lead to more outcome-based regulation, greater legislative clarity, and improved service delivery through digital solutions while supporting economic growth and job creation and improving the way we deliver services to Albertans. Mr. Speaker, our government made a commitment to make life easier for Albertans and Alberta businesses by reducing unnecessary red tape. With Bill 9 we're doing just that. This is further action we're taking as a national leader in cutting red tape for job creators, taxpayers, and families.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I'd like to thank all members for the thoughtful discussion that's taken place about this bill. I will continue to bring forward legislation that reduces and eliminates unnecessary red tape.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. the minister of red tape reduction has moved Bill 9, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, for third reading. Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate? The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and offer some thoughts on the bill that we're considering here this evening for third reading, specifically Bill 9, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. This is the latest in a series of red tape reduction bills that the government has brought forward that have varied from the completely meaningless and empty to downright cruel, and we have examples of both of them here in this piece of legislation.

Now, when the minister got up to introduce this bill here just a few minutes ago, you know, he talked about the thousands and thousands of pieces of red tape that this government is alleged to have reduced. It's quite the easiest thing in the world to do, Mr. Speaker. You make up a target, a completely fictional number, and then you say, "Well, we'll reduce that completely fictional number by one-third," and then, oh, all of a sudden: it's four years later; we've magically hit our target that we made up from the very beginning. It's quite the easiest thing to do. It's like playing darts, and then once the darts have hit the board, you go walk up to the wall and draw the circle wherever the dart has landed. It's an incredible trick that the government has played here on itself, thinking that it has reduced red tape by a third, because it's a completely meaningless number.

How do we know this is meaningless, Mr. Speaker? Well, I've had the privilege to sit on the Public Accounts Committee for the last couple of years, and every annual report from every department has one brief section on the so-called red tape that they've reduced, and they say: well, when our bean-counters went through the department, we found 10,478 pieces of red tape that exist in the department, and we reduced 2,949 of those. They give themselves

a big pat on the back, and then the Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain asks the deputy minister to go into more detail about the alleged red tape that they've reduced, and then they go back and forth and talk about how good a job they've done. Meanwhile they don't get into any of the real issues that have cropped up in that department every year. It's a mutual appreciation moment of public accounts.

Our members on Public Accounts have started challenging the departments to release the lists of the alleged thousands of pieces of red tape that they claim to have reduced in their annual reports. And guess what, Mr. Speaker? They failed to produce a list at all. So I think the reasonable Albertan would suspect when the minister of red tape reduction makes these claims about thousands of pieces of red tape that his government has allegedly eliminated over the past four years. If his department can't produce a comprehensive list of those things, then I think that the average Albertan has the complete right to be skeptical that any meaningful red tape has been reduced whatsoever.

9:00

I look forward to being proven wrong, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure the minister could make a call to the departments that have allegedly reduced red tape and get these lists, that our members have been asking for in Public Accounts for the last few months, and table them here in the Legislature. I think that would be an illuminating exercise for all of us, to go through each department and see exactly how many thousands of pieces of red tape they claimed to have eliminated and what those are and a detailed explanation as to how the lives of Albertans have been improved by the elimination of each of those pieces of red tape. That would be, I think, a tremendous service that I'm sure the minister is no doubt willing to do to justify his claim that his government has reduced thousands and thousands of pieces of red tape.

Mr. Speaker, these red tape reduction bills would normally just be a minor irritation, like I said, just this government creating a fictional target for itself and then claiming that they've achieved it four years later and giving themselves pats on the back if it weren't for the sections of this bill that actually hurt people. I'm specifically referring to the changes made in this piece of legislation around the WCB.

Now, I'm very encouraged, Mr. Speaker, that the Workers' Compensation Act is being amended so that the latency periods for firefighters who were in the Fort Mac fire from May 1, 2016, to June 1, 2016, are being removed. I think it's only fair that people who were exposed to more than a lifetime's worth of carcinogens in the matter of a few hours and who have subsequently developed cancer in the process of saving the thousands of people who live in and whose livelihoods depend on Fort McMurray, that those people be treated fairly, that we look after them because they did so much to look after us.

Upon review of this bill, our caucus identified the fact that these changes only apply on a go-forward basis and that anybody who has already applied to the WCB for compensation and who has either not made it yet through the system or who has been denied compensation won't be covered under this piece of legislation. That's incredibly heartless and cruel to those members of the firefighting community who gave their all to save a significant portion of this province from disaster and are now suffering the personal health consequences of their bravery, and the government is telling them: too bad; there's nothing we can do.

You know, I want to thank my friend the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for continuing to raise this issue in question period day after day. When she raised this issue in question period the first time, I remember the Premier quite clearly saying: oh, we'll take a

look at the amendment that the member was going to bring forward, and the minister will have more to say on that once we've had a chance to review it. Well, I think, Mr. Speaker, before we got out of question period, the minister had already decided that, no, he wasn't going to entertain these changes. So any hopes that somebody who might be covered by this amendment might finally be eligible for WCB coverage for injuries, disabilities, health conditions that they've suffered or developed because of their work to fight the Fort McMurray fire were dashed within an hour of my friend from Edmonton-Mill Woods asking the question.

My friend from Edmonton-Mill Woods, I think, in her generous spirit, thought that the minister didn't realize exactly what he was saying no to, so she gave him a second chance, asked him again whether or not he would consider this amendment, and he flat out refused. In fact, Mr. Speaker, he gave an answer so bad that he was not allowed to answer any further questions on the matter here in question period. Instead, the member from Fort McMurray started answering the questions from my friend from Edmonton-Mill Woods on his behalf.

At that point I thought: well, finally, we're making some progress. Surely, the member from Fort McMurray wouldn't deny his own friends and neighbours and constituents who bravely fought this fire and are now suffering the personal health consequences, surely he wouldn't be so cruel and heartless as to deny them access to WCB by allowing this amendment.

Imagine my shock and surprise when, in fact, that's exactly what he stood up and did over and over and over again. He did it again today, this afternoon in question period, and then later this afternoon all members of the government voted against the amendment that our party brought forward that would finally give these heroes a chance to be covered by WCB when they've previously been denied the coverage that they're properly owed.

We haven't heard anything resembling a reasonable argument as to why this amendment couldn't have been adopted. At first, they said that it wasn't possible, that it was legally impossible to look back, to create these kinds of look-back clauses in the legislation. Well, that turned out not to be true, because just a few days after they floated that excuse, the Conservative government in Ontario amended their workers' compensation legislation to allow similar people to have retroactive coverage all the way back to 1960. So there went that excuse.

Then they were all out of excuses, Mr. Speaker, so they just started to throw metaphorical dirt in our eyes, said: well, you had four years to change the system; why didn't you do it? Well, we made significant changes to the WCB system that significantly improved the way that it treats injured workers.

I know for a fact that the number of calls and e-mails to my office from people who are upset about how the WCB has been treating them plummeted after the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods made significant changes to the operations of the WCB through a number of pieces of legislation that she brought forward here, and I commended her for her work. All Albertans who have been through that system should commend her for her work in improving a system that was really not well suited to treating injured employees fairly. She made significant advances on that front.

But nobody gets everything right all the time. This is something that needed to be addressed – can still be addressed – and the government, when it says, “Oh, you could've done something but you didn't do it when you had the chance,” is tacitly admitting that it is a mistake. But instead of owning up to it and just accepting the amendment, they want to pitch a fit, point their fingers at the NDP, blame us for not doing what we should have known needed to be done four years in advance, and then they refuse to do the thing that

needs to be done. Mr. Speaker, it's completely unfair. I don't know why the government would be so stone-hearted on this matter.

9:10

By his own admission, the member from Fort McMurray says that the number of people who would be impacted by this change is very small. I don't know the exact numbers. I'm sure the minister could provide them if he were so inclined. That makes it even more galling to know that they refuse to adopt this amendment that my friend brought forward, because an effect to the overall WCB system would be so minor as to not be noticed, but that would be life-changing to those people who would be covered under WCB who right now are being denied. Absolutely life-changing and validating.

Those people know that the injuries and health effects that they suffered were a direct cause of the Fort McMurray fire, but the processes that they're going through with the WCB, or that they've gone through, have told them that, no, on paper it isn't. We owe them not only the financial compensation that they deserve for the health effects that they suffered saving this province, but we also owe them the validation that will come from having the WCB tell them that what they're going through is a direct result of their heroic actions in the Fort McMurray fire.

It floors me that these members opposite are so stone-hearted that they refuse to take action on this. I know that firefighters won't forget. Certainly, the firefighters who laid their lives on the line in Fort McMurray won't forget. I know that in spite of the way that this government has treated them, should Albertans ever find themselves in need of their services, they will go and risk their lives again without question. It would only be nice if the government would return the favour of service and treat them with the dignity and respect and the sense of care that they treated us with. But I guess under this UCP government that's only a one-way street. These are people who are only interested in taking from others and not giving back. It's a real shame.

I'm glad that I don't have to live with this on my conscience. I'm glad that my friends here in the NDP opposition are on the right side of history. I suspect that there are 60 or so members who will live to regret this day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I dive into the debate at hand on Bill 9, I hope you'll allow me some latitude for a few parting comments in what could be my last time to rise in this Chamber. Firstly, as a proud born-and-raised Albertan it has indeed been an honour and privilege to serve the 48,000-plus constituents of Calgary-Fish Creek, my hometown of Calgary, and people across this province. As MLA 900 – and some of my colleagues will know that my Chinese friends would like me to have number 888, but that happens to be the privilege of the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul, so kudos to him – I'm reminded of the small number of Albertans who can claim to have enjoyed this rare opportunity for and privilege of public service.

Mr. Speaker, I came into this Chamber with a commitment to principled behaviour, ethics, integrity, and fairness, and I am proud to say that I am leaving it with those commitments intact. And trust me; it has not always been easy. But rest assured that I'm not about to break into song with my own version of Frank Sinatra's *My Way*. I'll spare you that tonight.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the work that I've been able to do in aviation, housing, seniors' care, and cross-border relations and will

take those accomplishments and the friends that I've made through those sectors with me in private life outside of this Chamber. But this is really, most importantly, my last chance to thank so many people who have allowed me this privilege, and I apologize in advance in knowing that I will forget many more inside and outside of this building.

Firstly, I would like to thank my wife, Cathy for enduring love, support, hard work and encouragement, patience and guidance in the almost eight-year journey of serving family, friends, neighbours, and constituents in our roles as candidate, MLA, and partner. All of you know that when we sign up, they sign up, and it's not always an easy role, with politics often creating unimaginable challenges in our relationships and in our lives. Special thanks to my now adult children, Jordan, Justin, and Georgia, who have also supported me in so many ways with their love, encouragement, and hard work, learning about the world of politics from the inside and often engaging lifelong friends in the cause and being understanding when duty called and being understanding and knowing that I would rather have been by their sides.

Mr. Speaker, knowing that they are always watching reminds us all to lead by example and to make sure that they're proud of us, of what we do, and when we do it. And kudos to the extended families we have all enjoyed that are vital to our roles, be it parents, siblings, or just those people in the community that adopt us as we adopt them as members of our political family or, further, as a part of a passionate and dedicated team off and on the doors. To them a huge and heartfelt thank you, which brings me broadly to my incredible volunteers and the people that show up so selflessly to give of their time, energy, passion, and commitment to democracy. That is what makes so much of this all worth while in this Chamber. I thank them for the thousands of hours of commitment in supporting me and my family during campaigns and throughout the year and providing open, honest, and frank feedback to me and, through me, to my party and our government. They indeed make us better and remind us of why we are all here.

And not to be forgotten, Mr. Speaker, the dedicated staff we have the privilege of working with in these hallowed halls each and every day, ministry and caucus staff, and the many young, smart, and ambitious legislative co-ordinators I've had the privilege of mentoring over the years – I have to admit I've kind of lost count, but they know who they are, and they know how much I've appreciated them – the incredible people in the Speaker's office, not the least, Mr. Speaker, of course, is yourself, and more broadly across the LAO in administration, finance, HR, IT, and security roles, not to mention our delightful pages. Thank you, all, for making our world easier and brighter each and every day and for keeping us grounded by reminding us who we serve: you and millions of other Albertans outside of this building.

Lastly, I would like to thank my legislative colleagues on both sides of the aisle for challenging each and every one of us to keep an open mind, look at things through a broader lens, to embrace good ideas wherever they may come from, and to bring intelligence, honour, humility, and integrity to this Chamber each and every day as we all stand committed to serving Albertans. Yes, we may disagree, and many have strived to do so without being disagreeable – sometimes that doesn't always work – but I have to believe and remind myself that each and every person in these 87 seats of honour and representation believe that they're doing what's best for Albertans. And, Mr. Speaker, what's wrong with a little healthy debate and banter on how best to get there?

Mr. Speaker, in my last few hours in this place of tradition, where we collectively build a bright future for all Albertans, I would implore each and every one of us to do the best that we can to lead

by example, to bring out our best so that we can do our best for Albertans, to reflect on how we can co-operate and collaborate and occasionally compromise for the betterment of all, and to do what we can to bring people together versus fanning the winds of anger, polarization, and division, as there is no doubt in my mind that we can all be better, do better, and deliver our best each and every day to the people that we serve.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for this privilege, for the latitude in being able to share my thoughts today, for your patience, and Godspeed to us all. Thank you. [Standing ovation]

9:20

Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to express my strong support for Bill 9, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. If passed, this piece of legislation will not only be a testament to this government's commitment to serving the people of this province but also a clear demonstration of its dedication to reducing red tape for Albertans. Bill 9 will address a wide range of concerns identified by Albertans through consultation, from protecting our bee populations to improving municipal taxpayers' rights.

However, what stands out for me as both a representative for Calgary-Fish Creek, a resident of Calgary, is the crucial role that it will play in ensuring public safety through reducing the risk posed by violent offenders. Anybody that knows me well will know I'm a bit of a tough-on-crime guy. I believe in safe communities, I believe in deterrence, and I believe that we need to move forward in ways that will achieve that.

As a resident of Calgary I, as many other Albertans, know first-hand how the federal Liberal government's failed bail polices have led to a growing public disorder and an increasing threat to the safety of our communities and, in particular, to our major cities. That is why I'm proud to see that this government has been tirelessly working to protect Albertans from these dangers. The proposed amendments to the Income and Employment Supports Act included in Bill 9 are a prime example of its commitment to this goal.

Under this bill individuals with outstanding warrants for violent offences will be subject to the suspension of provincial income supports. It sounds pretty simple. While this may seem like a small and straightforward action, it is, in fact, a crucial step that will ensure our tax dollars are not going towards supporting known violent offenders who are actively avoiding justice. Mr. Speaker, I am certain that yourself and many others in this House will agree with me when I say that Albertans should not have to foot the bill for violent offenders avoiding arrest.

The thought that law-abiding citizens in this province should be forced to pay for financial assistance going to individuals who have committed violent offences and are actively evading the law is not only an insult to our taxpayers but also a blatant acceptance of grave danger towards our communities. We will not accept that, Mr. Speaker. By passing Bill 9, this government will be taking a decisive step towards protecting Albertans from violent offenders while improving public safety.

The proposed amendments to the Income and Employment Supports Act included in this bill reflect a necessary and common-sense step in achieving this goal. By targeting violent offenders who decide to evade capture, Bill 9 demonstrates this government's resolve towards tackling social disorder while maintaining a humane approach to doing so.

Mr. Speaker, let me be clear in my emphasis on the considered approach that this bill will take in its amendments. While targeting the violent offenders themselves, the amendments will ensure that dependants and families, often victims themselves of wanted violent offenders, continue receiving the government support that

they need. Additionally, we are not targeting nonviolent offenders as there's an understanding that, for some, these supports are critical for them, their dependants, and to continue living healthily and safely and to recover from other issues that they may be facing.

This bill is not just about being tough on crime for the sake of it. It is about protecting our citizens and ensuring that our communities are safe and secure. This by no stretch is a new concept, with adoption of similar policies in British Columbia and Saskatchewan, but without doubt it is a necessary and overdue one. In addition, Bill 9 will act to reduce risk to our law enforcement personnel, near and dear to our hearts due to recent events, in serving risky, costly, time-consuming search warrants for violent offenders. I am confident in the fact that as of the last few weeks the dangers posed to our community law enforcement officers is something at the front of everybody's minds, all Albertans, and in our hearts, indeed.

By cutting wanted violent offenders off from government funds, we may be able to force them to turn themselves in and surrender peacefully rather than continuing to avoid justice through means that put them and the general public at risk. By supporting them, we possibly support them reoffending in the community. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be supporting this bill and encourage everyone in this House to do so as well.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? Thank you to the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for his service to the Assembly.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning and Official Opposition deputy House leader.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I rise to speak to Bill 9, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. Given that today is water day, I'm going to focus on the changes that are being made to the Irrigation Districts Act, and then I'm going to move into talking a little bit about the changes that were also made to the Municipal Government Act. Again, I think, you know, as the minister indicated when he moved third reading of this piece of legislation, that this is now the ninth bill that the government has introduced. As a member of the opposition I know we have repeatedly stood up and spoken to the fact that some of the changes that continuously keep being made throughout these different pieces of legislation are at some point going to create problems down the line as they do start to impact other pieces. I'll get to that in a minute.

First, I just want to talk about the changes that are being made to the Irrigation Districts Act. Obviously, there are no concerns in relation to the act or this specific change, as the Irrigation Districts Act basically disenables all 13 irrigation districts in Alberta and removes the reference to the Taber irrigation district, as it's been amalgamated with others, and obviously clarifies ways waters may be misused, and therefore a delivery of water can also at some times be stopped if it's determined that it's being misused.

Part of the concern that I have around and the part that I want to discuss specific to irrigation is that we've heard repeatedly from the government about the substantial investment that's being made in these specific irrigation districts. I don't disagree that those investments are important to the economic opportunity that will be created in those communities, the opportunities to look at specialized crops and supporting, obviously, some of the issues that have come up through our drought that has happened over the last couple of years. But the one thing that I did want to flag – and I've spoken to the minister about this and was hoping to also flag it with the Minister of Finance – is that we know that when this money was initially promised by the federal government in partnership with the

provincial government and in partnership with the irrigation districts, it was promised a couple of years ago.

These projects have been under planning, have been, you know, looking at putting shovels in the ground. All of that is great work, but the issue that has arisen out of that, that we all are aware of, is that there have been substantial inflationary costs that have been attached to many of these projects. In fact, if you speak to different members of the irrigation districts, part of the other issue is the fact that they can't even get the pipe that they need at this point because of the issues that we're seeing through the supply chain. The direct issue that's going to happen with that is that although these projects are important and we need to be supporting them, there needs to be a recognition by all levels of government that there is going to be a substantial financial increase due to those inflationary costs. I've spoken to some of the districts that are saying that at this point, even though they still don't even have the pipe, they're estimating it's going to be an additional 30 per cent increase on the overall cost of the project.

The concern with that is: where will that money come from? We know that because of the way that the project is being funded and the fact that it is split between the different partnerships, there is a responsibility for each level to contribute to those costs. As we were just debating some other financial bills, there needs to be a recognition that in the next couple of years these projects are going to actually require more financial assistance. If the federal government decides that they're going to be willing to increase their funding contribution, I think that's great.

I think the province also needs to be looking at those projects and determining what their roles and responsibilities are going to be in relation to making sure that those are still financially viable and then, of course, talking with those irrigation districts and consulting to make sure that they're aware that there continue to be some financial costs that are going to increase over time. I know they're aware because they're the ones that are able to tell me that as of today it's potentially 30 per cent more than what was initially estimated. That will, over the 13 different districts and the potential new projects that are being evaluated at this time, have a significant financial cost to the provincial budget and also could potentially delay the ability of these irrigation districts to be able to expand and build.

I just wanted to make sure that that is still something that is live and aware to all members of the government side. It's one thing to talk about the investment, but there also needs to just be an acknowledgement that now the actual investment that is coming forward, the dollars that have been promised are actually going to be short, and it will ultimately impact. There needs to be a conversation and an adjustment made to address that component.

9:30

The other changes that are being made to the act, I think, around the electronic notices, the increase to the appointments to irrigation councils from seven to nine: I mean, that's housekeeping, and that makes sense. Other than that, there really aren't any other substantial changes. You know, I don't particularly have a problem with that.

Now, the other part and going back to my comments when I first started speaking, about the minister speaking about how many of these red tape reduction bills the government has had and the fact that, you know, as opposition we keep continuously flagging that when you change one section of an act, it sometimes will impact other sections of an act: we've had this conversation repeatedly. We now see in this piece of legislation that the MGA, or the Municipal Government Act, is being changed again. What happened, just to walk us down memory lane, was that in 2022 we had a previous red

tape reduction act, and that act actually made it so that municipalities were not able to add additional charges onto property taxes if the property was considered to be unsightly or the property was considered dangerous or there was a deterioration of that property.

Obviously, going back to, you know, conversations around abandoned wells and cleanup and the importance of all of that, municipalities also need to ensure that their properties that are existing within their municipalities are kept to a place where they are not considered a safety risk. Their mechanism to be able to do that was to ensure that they were able to go to property owners and say: we're going to charge you an additional fee on your property taxes unless you clean this up. Well, that was removed in the red tape reduction act of 2022. Who would have thought, Mr. Speaker? I mean, I think the opposition flagging that this was going to be an issue would've been enough to consider that maybe the government shouldn't have done it, but it went ahead. Now we see in this piece of legislation: oops, government made a mistake. We now have to change it again to ensure that municipalities have the mechanisms that they need to make properties safe and be able to have financial penalties for those property owners who are not taking care of their land. I hate to say, "I told you so," but, like, this was one of those things where we said, "You probably shouldn't do it," but it happened anyway.

Again, I think, you know, as much as the government likes to continuously talk about how great these red tape reduction acts are, we continuously – and we've had this conversation on the last debate, on the last red tape bill about the fact that every single time there's one of these bills introduced, it makes a change somewhere, and then we have to see the government coming back and having to do another amendment to the exact same section because they mess it up. This is the problem when you do these big pieces of legislation that impact different statutes through a variety of different pieces of legislation that don't connect. The government, when they do these things, misses the big piece of the legislation, looks at only one piece of the section, and it ends up impacting a variety of other sections. That's a problem because we can't continuously keep coming back into the House, although the government likes to do that, and keep fixing the same mistakes over and over again because the government isn't taking the time to actually review the pieces of legislation and the statutes the way that they should be.

Again, I mean, I'm glad to see that the government fixed the mistake, but it really shouldn't have been an error to begin with. It should have been something where, you know, when it's being brought up by the opposition and recognized that this is probably going to be an issue, it is acknowledged that the mistake is being made.

I think, you know, that brings me to what my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar was speaking about in relation to: the opposition has tried to be helpful in relation to Bill 9. My hon. colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods has identified the fact that there is a piece of the legislation in relation to workers' compensation where there is a gap missing in the way that we support our firefighters and specifically the firefighters in Fort McMurray and is trying to be working in collaboration with the government to say: "Since you are doing this, why don't you fix this section? Make it retroactive. Do the right thing, and make sure that the presumptive cancer coverage is there. The section is already open. This one little piece was missing. Put it in, get it done, and just move on."

Instead, this government is so adamant about not taking any type of suggestion from the opposition that it's almost like it's become so that even if it's a good idea, it's still a bad idea because the opposition brought it up. I think that in relation to something like this, it's a bad idea to use this just to be stubborn, would be my

summary of that. I feel like the government has chosen to be stubborn on it just out of the fact that it's because it's the opposition. Had a member on their side of the House, maybe, flagged this and said, "Uh-oh, this is a problem; why don't we do this?" the government may have been more willing to do it. I think that that's a disservice to Albertans.

You know, I've been listening this evening to the hon. members who are retiring and the great speeches that they've given us this evening in relation to the responsibilities that we have in this House as elected officials. We don't always have to agree. It's clear that we have fundamental differences in how we view things, yet there are opportunities for us to work in collaboration and work together to the betterment of Albertans. I believe that the comments made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and the amendment that was brought forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods are an opportunity to demonstrate to Albertans that we have the ability to do that. We can get past the partisanship and just do something that is in the good and in the proper way to support the people of this province.

So I'm disappointed that we're at third reading and that we're still having to debate this issue that clearly has been able to be demonstrated across the country. We have other jurisdictions that have been able to adapt and been able to find a legislative mechanism to be able to provide the back pay and expand on the presumptive cancer coverage for firefighters. It can be done, so I don't understand why, while the section is already open and we are already debating it in this Legislature, the government wouldn't just take the opportunity to do it. It's easy. It was already done. The opposition did all the work. The government just needed to say: hmm, sounds good to me; let's get 'er done.

Again, I would caution the government around the use of these red tape reduction bills. I think the hon. minister said this is number nine. I feel like we've done this nine times, and nine times we've learned that every time this happens, something doesn't work, and there's always a mistake somewhere that then needs to be fixed in the next red tape reduction bill. Although the government will be, like, "We got a gold star from an organization about how great we are on red tape reduction," the problem is that every time there's a red tape reduction, they have to come back and undo the red tape reduction because it actually creates problems in relation to other pieces, so it doesn't work.

I would encourage the government to slow down, to take the time to do the proper analysis, and to really look at the legislation that they are amending and make sure that the changes that are happening make sense and – let's be fair – consult with the organizations, whether it's municipalities, whether it's firefighters, whether it's around agriculture. Whatever organizations are impacted by the changes that are going to be made, make sure you ask the question about whether or not it actually is going to do what the government thinks it does because, clearly, there are pieces missing, and there continue to be pieces missing. I am sure that if we come back to this place and we have to do another one of these acts, we're going to be fixing another section that we're talking about this evening.

Again, I just would like to encourage the government to slow down and reconsider their direction.

The Speaker: Members, are there others? The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My colleagues on this side of the House have spoken to a number of issues relating to this particular bill. I would like to address another one that is of concern.

Now, I understand that the members opposite are tough on crime.

9:40

Mr. Bilous: They say they're tough on crime.

Member Loyola: Good point. They say they're tough on crime. But my particular concern has to do with their proposing to cut anyone with an outstanding warrant off income support. Of course, when you read the actual bill, it says:

15.1 The Director must, subject to the regulations, refuse to provide income support and benefits to an applicant or recipient under Part 2, Division 1 when notified that

- (a) a warrant for the arrest of the applicant or recipient has been issued in respect of a prescribed offence, and
- (b) the warrant has not been executed.

Now, I understand that members on the other side of the House are selling this particular portion of the bill as for people who have committed violent crimes, but nowhere is that specified in the bill. When you do a crossjurisdictional, there are other jurisdictions that have specifically focused on people who have committed violent crimes and cutting them off any kind of government support. But in this particular bill we don't see that. Then what's the concern, Mr. Speaker? It's that a person could have a warrant out for their arrest for jaywalking, as far as we know, which, of course, is not a violent crime. They jaywalked.

Also a concern that I have with this is that there are many people on the streets of Edmonton and other municipalities across the province who have an issue with addiction. As we all know, addiction and having a drug problem is related to prior trauma that that person has experienced in their life. Now, I understand, as the Member for Edmonton-Manning was saying, there are things that we fundamentally disagree on in this House. When it comes to the issue of addiction and those who have made bad decisions in their life, and I'm not saying that – you know what, Mr. Speaker? I always tell my sons this. I have two beautiful sons, 14 and 18. I always tell them: we're all one bad decision away from our life spiralling down to a point where we could be in a very serious predicament, and we could be facing a dire situation; we're all that one bad decision away. For me, an Albertan who makes a bad decision and has an issue with addiction because of the past trauma that they've had in their life needs our help. An individual like this could be one that has a warrant out for their arrest.

You know, Mr. Speaker, it's come to my attention – and I'll take this opportunity to wish all my Muslim brothers and sisters in the province of Alberta, across Canada and the world Ramadan Mubarak, Ramadan Kareem. May Allah grant them many blessings and continue to encourage them to do their good deeds, to continue doing good here in the province of Alberta and contribute to our beautiful province. May they be blessed always.

It has come to my attention, Mr. Speaker, that, you know, we have Muslim brothers and, I assume, sisters as well who are incarcerated both at a federal level and at a provincial level. To me, I think about this, and I say to myself: okay; my Muslim brother who is incarcerated isn't any less Muslim and isn't any less human; my brother or my sister in that kind of predicament, in that situation made a mistake. Now, we're all trying to do our best to live our best lives. It came to my attention that Muslim brothers and sisters in the corrections facilities are not allowed to have a prayer rug, and they're not allowed to have a tasbeeh, prayer beads. I can understand why. I can understand, like, why there would be a situation with this. But then what I found also really disheartening is the fact that Muslim brothers and, I assume, sisters who are incarcerated, because of the not enough space and correctional officers to inmates, can only pray their jum'ah prayer every four or five weeks.

Now, I get it; they're being incarcerated. Someone on the other side might say: "Well, you know what? They don't have the right

to do so." But, again, I would say to them, "It doesn't make them any less Muslim, and it doesn't make them less human." We should be inspiring and encouraging people to make the right decisions and, if they are in a correctional institution, to better their lives, eventually rehabilitate, get out of there, come back out into society, and be contributing members to this society. Help them get back on track.

So my concern with this particular piece of the legislation is that we could be having a very adverse effect on individuals within our society who, again, may have a warrant out for their arrest for something that is not a violent crime because it's not stipulated in the legislation, as I mentioned. It is stipulated in other pieces of legislation across Canada. When you look at the crossjurisdictional, there are other pieces of legislation that do have this, but they specifically focus on people who have committed a violent crime.

I think that there are a lot of factors that members on the other side of the House have actually let themselves get a little bit carried away with when it comes to this piece of legislation. I understand that they want to be tough on crime, but there are individuals that could be caught in this that it may not warrant them being treated in this particular way.

Of course, we have to remember that those individuals are also fathers, are also mothers, we could be adversely impacting the children that are part of that household. I would ask the members to please consider that. Let's get this piece of legislation right. If other jurisdictions across Canada have actually focused on violent offenders and that's what the members on the other side of the House want to do, then do that. But don't leave it so open that individuals in our society who are having a tough time, who perhaps are addicted to substance abuse because of past trauma, are being caught and trapped in this dire situation.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore has the call.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As always, it's a privilege to rise, and for me, I just wanted to say that particularly with red tape reduction I want to thank all my colleagues as well. There's so much that goes into this kind of legislation and so much work and consultation that happens in order to make sure that the legislation that gets passed in here is actually helping and contributes to how business moves forward in this province.

I really appreciate my colleague who just stood up to talk about addiction and mental health, and we all know how difficult legislation is going into these pieces, and how we work with that is very, very hard. I appreciated what he was saying, but I don't think that this legislation is going to cause folks to be arrested for the wrong reasons. In my opinion, I think that that might be a bit misleading, but I certainly appreciate the conversation.

If you permit me, Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to speak since this will also be my last day in the Legislature. I wanted to say what an honour it's been to be part of this institution, and it's been one of the biggest privileges of my life. I'm honoured to have served with each and every one of you in this Legislature, and from security to the folks in *Hansard* that are sometimes in this with us – I think, what was our longest day? Was it 82 hours, 84 hours? I can't remember – and the LAO, the pages and the staff, and especially our staff who are the heartbeat of all of our offices, whether here or at home as well.

9:50

To my colleagues who have spoken before me: thank you so much for everything that you've done and for your contributions to my life. In this building – I leave this place full of so much gratitude

in serving this beautiful province. The power of this place comes from the people and the democracy and the right to vote and equality and the power to make meaningful change.

Thank you so much to my family for their sacrifice and for their support during the last eight years.

This place is the House for all Albertans. So many of us bring folks into here, and they don't realize that this is their House. Thank you to all of you who have opened this House to so many people and shown them what democracy actually looks like.

In my time here I think about how tentative and unsure all of us were when we first walked in, and many of you: we've served together over the years, and now we speak with passion and conviction about the things that are important to us. I learn so much from all of you every single time any one of you speaks.

Thank you so much to the constituencies of Chestermere-Rocky View and then Chestermere-Strathmore for allowing me the privilege of representing you.

And to you, Mr. Speaker, as well: thank you so much.

I will be forever grateful for the trust of the people for having been able to serve here. This has been a remarkable experience, and I thank you.

Thank you very much. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Thank you for your service.

Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate on third reading of Bill 9?

Seeing none, I am prepared to close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a third time]

The Speaker: The hon. government whip.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request unanimous consent to waive standing orders 8(2) and 8(7)(d) in order to proceed immediately to third reading on Bill 204, Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2022.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 204

Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2022

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to move third reading of private member's Bill 204, the Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2022.

Private member's Bill 204 was designed to correct the inconsistencies that were discovered between the Missing Persons Act and private member's Bill 210 that was passed in 2017. It may have been passed, but these inconsistencies impeded the proclamation of private member's Bill 210.

Should private member's Bill 204 be passed by this Legislature, it will ensure that all police services across the province of Alberta will have access to a silver alert that will help to safeguard vulnerable and at-risk seniors or other adults with cognitive impairments that have gone missing. Mr. Speaker, by 2031, as the tail end of the baby boomers, my generation, reaches 65 years of age, Alberta's seniors population is projected to reach approximately 1 million people. At the same time, as Albertans age, the risk of dementia doubles every five years after the age of 65. Private member's Bill 204 will enable police services to bring all

citizens and the resources of the media infrastructure to bear on finding and returning a missing senior back to their loved ones.

Mr. Speaker, I've chosen not to run in the upcoming election, so my opportunity to address this Assembly on behalf of my constituents in Drayton Valley-Devon is rapidly coming to an end. It's been one of the paramount privileges of my life to serve in this Legislature, and private member's Bill 204 will help to save lives and to protect our seniors, and I believe it is a fitting piece of legislation upon which I can retire. This bill has all-party support and, I believe, represents how this Assembly can work best. I want to thank the members of this Chamber for their support, and I want to thank the leadership of both parties for ensuring that we could pass this piece of legislation within the limited time that we have left in this session of the Legislature of Alberta.

But I would be remiss if I did not recognize tonight the many people who have helped make this bill possible. My thanks to the many legislative co-ordinators and United Conservative Party staff who have helped make this bill possible. I would like to especially recognize Ms Karah Folk, Mr. Benjamin Smith, Dr. Bill Bewick, Ms Elina Pachon, Ms Emma Hopper, Mr. Benjamyn McKay, and the many staff of the Ministry of Justice and the ministry of seniors who have helped push this bill forward. I would like to thank Mrs. Maureen Gough, who helped me understand the need for a silver alert, and I would dedicate this bill in the memory of her mother. I would like to thank all of the stakeholders that helped to guide the amendments that have been built into private member's Bill 204.

And I would like to thank my family. None of us in this Chamber can do our job of representing our constituents and the people of Alberta without the many sacrifices that our families make on our behalf. While they will never be able to vote or to speak to this bill tonight, it is my firm belief that this bill would not have made it past the germ of an idea without the support that I have received from my wife and my immediate family. Thank you.

Finally, I would like to thank all of my constituents of Drayton Valley-Devon for the opportunity to serve you over these last two terms. It's been the singular privilege of my life, and I leave this Legislature more convinced than ever in the common sense of the common people. It is you that makes our democracy a vibrant and a viable form of government, and I pray that you will continue to exercise your democratic rights, that you will choose wisely your next MLA in the upcoming general election.

With these thoughts I would ask this Assembly to vote in favour of private member's Bill 204 and provide the people of Alberta with a silver alert tool that will help to find at-risk seniors when they go missing in Alberta. Thank you. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: On third reading of Bill 204 are there others?

Proceed. If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview – I see he's now rising.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry I was a little slow to pop up.

I want to start off by thanking the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon for moving this bill, but also his words, as others who have spoken this evening, thanking a number of people that we all, I think, feel and think about every day, you know, the people who have supported us to come to this place and do the work that we do. The fact of the matter is that if it wasn't for our families, our friends, and the people around us, none of us could do this job. I echo the words of my colleagues on all sides of the House thanking, you know, their loved ones, their families for supporting them and enabling us to do the job that we do because without them, we couldn't.

10:00

I think about the fact that I am very privileged to have represented a riding here in Edmonton. I think about my colleagues that travel from all corners of the province often, that in addition to serving in this Chamber, through you, Mr. Speaker, to the members, you all spend countless hours on the road, away from your families, travelling to and from this place. You know, I'd be remiss if I didn't say that part of the reason why I decided to pursue provincial politics over federal politics was because I didn't want to spend half my life on an airplane away from my family, even more than we do. I salute all 338 members of our federal Parliament who made that choice and that sacrifice, which implicates their families as well. But to the members here, from Taber-Warner to our northernmost ridings in this province, in east and west and all around, I mean, it's a great distance to travel, sometimes in atrocious weather.

I recall, you know, many people who have served in this place, members from all sides of the House, and I can't help but think about Manmeet Bhullar, who lost his life helping others and made the ultimate sacrifice. Again, had he not had to travel a far distance, then I'm sure the outcome would be much different today. This, I must say, is not what I had planned to say when I rose, but I do want to thank each and every member in this Chamber.

I'll take this opportunity to say my hope is that the 31st Legislature could bring together the 87 MLAs to focus on policy, to focus on making Alberta a better province. I appreciate we all come with our own unique perspectives and we come from different political parties, but I, for one, didn't run for office to try to smear somebody's name or to ruin them or their family. You know, I ran because I love my community and I want to see Alberta grow and prosper and I wanted to serve. I believe that every member in this Chamber and every member before us chose to run because they had that same passion for our communities, our neighbourhoods, our families, our friends, our province.

You know, I've been here long enough to understand how this place has worked and can work, but that's not the only way. We've seen collaboration on all sides of the House. We've seen the political parties set aside their differences, pull off their colours, and work together for better legislation, for better policy, for better debate. I truly hope that our next Legislature will do better than we did, because when I talk to Albertans, that's the part they like the least about politics and politicians: the division, the hate, the anger, the trying to win at all costs. And what is winning? Who wins in the end? We all want to see Alberta prosper and succeed and do well.

Again, I've been very lucky to have been a part of this place when we have all parties voting for unanimous consent to move a bill from first reading to third reading. That's happened fewer than 10 times in the history of our province, but it's been done, and we can do it again. I stand in support of the silver alert bill and – I was not planning to get emotional – want to thank the member for bringing it forward. There's no chance I'm going to be able to get through a personal story of how this would impact me and my family, but through you, Mr. Speaker, to the member, know that it does, and I thank you.

Times when we can stand together in unison and in solidarity: I think that restores the faith that Albertans have in our democratic system, that parties can work together to deliver outcomes for Albertans. In my final words I do also want to thank all of you, members. I want to thank the incredible people that enable us to do the jobs that we do: everybody in this building, from the people who

take care of it and clean it to the people that keep us safe, our security brothers and sisters, to *Hansard* to our table officers to the constituents and the voters that put us here. You know, one of the things that I try to remember is that there are fewer than one thousand Albertans who have ever had the privilege to serve in this Chamber, and it's been an incredible honour.

I'll end by thanking my family, my wife, my daughters, my parents, my friends, and all of you. It has been an incredible 11 years, and it's been an honour and a pleasure to serve.

Thank you. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Thank you for your remarks, hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. Know that all members of the Assembly develop friendships and relationships across the aisle. Through me to you: I have appreciated your friendship, hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, amongst many of you but in particular yours.

Are there others who are wishing to join in the debate on third reading of Bill 204?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the hon. member to close debate should he choose to do so.

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a third time]

10:10 **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole
(continued)

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 11
Appropriation Act, 2023

The Deputy Chair: Any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 11 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 12
Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2023

The Deputy Chair: Are there any members wishing to make comments, questions, or amendments with respect to the bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question on Bill 12, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2023?

[The clauses of Bill 12 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. government whip.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that the committee rise and report bills 11 and 12.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Mr. Turton: Sure. Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 11, Bill 12.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur with the report? All those in favour?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? Ordered and so carried.

The hon. chief government whip.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 23, 2023.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:14 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Government Bills and Orders

Committee of the Whole

Bill 10	Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2023	741
Bill 11	Appropriation Act, 2023.....	755
Bill 12	Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2023	755

Third Reading

Bill 8	Alberta Firearms Act	747
	Division	747
Bill 9	Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2023.....	747

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 204	Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2022	754
----------	----------------------------------------------------------	-----

Alberta Hansard is available online at www.assembly.ab.ca

For inquiries contact:

Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875

E-mail: AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca